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SOME DIETARY PROBLEMS OF FARM FAMILIES

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A radio talk by Hazel K. Stiebling, Bureau of Home Economics, broadcast Wednesday, July 7, 1937, in the home demonstration program, National Farm and Home Hour, by 63 stations associated with the National Broadcasting Company.

--ooOoo--

I wonder how many of you listeners helped us out with the food survey we engineered last year. Twenty thousand women in 24 different states DID help us. Half of these 20,000 women live on farms. The rest are in villages or small cities.

You see, we in the Bureau of Home Economics are very much interested in what America is eating. We all know that the welfare of our United States is largely determined by the health of its citizens. And people's health depends a great deal on what they eat.

So it wasn't just curiosity that led several Federal agencies -- the Works Progress Administration, the Bureau of Home Economics, and others -- to cooperate in finding out what people were eating. Each of 20,000 housewives took time to report just what food and how much of it she had fed her family the week before. She also told us how much of that food had been raised in her own garden or on the farm -- and how much food she had canned and stored.

Well, we certainly have found out some interesting facts about American eating. One thing that will please you farm folks -- farm family diets do seem to have the edge on the diets of city people. By and large, farm families have more milk, eggs, vegetables and fruits. These foods are so valuable from the standpoint of well-balanced diets that they are often called "protective foods."

But another fact brought out by our survey is that most people -- both on farms and in small cities -- don't eat enough of the green colored and leafy vegetables. And most families use too little milk. Yet many of these same families have gardens and cows! They just don't realize that when they plant their gardens they should make lots of room for such vegetables as chard and green beans and spinach -- for tomatoes and carrots. And that they should try to find some way to get more milk and cheese into the family diet.

It was surprising to me to find out how few families in small cities had gardens. We made our study in 19 typical cities, with a population between 8 and 15 thousand. And so far we have found only 2 of these small cities where more than half of the families had some sort of garden. And not one of the small cities we studied was raising enough garden stuff or other food to average \$15 worth a family a year.

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As you would expect, farm families raise far more of their food than do the small city families. In almost every state we found that the average value of home-grown food for farm families was more than \$250 per family per year. For some farms this \$250 worth of farm-furnished food amounted to half of the family's total food supply. For other families, the home-raised food was two thirds of the food total.

Animal products accounted for a large share of the money value of home-produced food. That is, milk, cream, eggs, poultry, and meat. More than two thirds of the farm families had eggs and poultry. And outside California and our Southeast, two thirds of them had their own milk. Everywhere except in California and drought-stricken Western Kansas, half or more of the farms had potatoes and some other garden truck.

You may wonder what professional home economists think of the eating habits of our people. Well, we realize from our survey that most people -- both on the farms and in the cities -- don't eat as much leafy green and yellow vegetables as they should -- and use far too little milk. As to bread and meat and fruit, we found most families fairly well supplied.

What people should do to improve their diets is to have a good food plan. Think through what foods your family should have to be in tip-top health. Figure out ways to get the family to consume more milk. Next figure out which are the most important vegetables, dietetically, to raise in your own garden, where to plan an extra fruit tree, a berry patch, or at least a few tomato vines.

Of course, garden and orchard plans must differ in different parts of the country and with different families. County home demonstration agents make excellent advisers in working out either a gardening or a dietary program. They are specialists in this field. They will gladly help you work out a year-round food program.

